

California Code of Regulations (CCR), Section 599.818 requires all State departments to evaluate their training programs "to determine if training activities are meeting the needs of the organization and its employees and training resources are properly allocated. In addition, each specific training program shall be evaluated to ensure that the course content supports the course objectives and that the training is appropriate for the intended purpose."

To determine the efficiency and effectiveness of our efforts to train the government workforce, it is necessary to establish criteria and procedures:

- To determine if training activities are meeting the business objectives of the organization, its employees, its customers, and the people of the State of California
- To determine that training resources are properly allocated
- To ensure that the course content supports the course objectives
- To determine that appropriate methods are used to deliver training
- To provide a means for determining Return On Investment

Effective job performance requires an environment that enables employees to apply knowledge, skills and abilities in ways that support the mission and goals of their organization.

The American Society for Training and Development lists five levels of evaluation that may be performed on training and development programs.¹ Departments should be aware of the distinction between the levels and the value of performing evaluations at each level. As a point of reference, "training" is defined in Section 599.817 as a process whereby employees "participate in a program of instruction (with lesson plan, instructor, or instructional device) to acquire skills and knowledge for their current or future job performance." Some strategies for improving performance through instruction may not fit this definition. However, the general principles outlined below are still useful when it comes to evaluating the efficiency of the approach being used.

These guidelines are intended to provide a perspective relative to the evaluation of training programs and their effectiveness. They do not address the impact of not providing training, whether some other program would have been better (unless that is also provided, evaluated, and compared), nor does it consider the impact of whether some employees were not trained by virtue of intent or omission.

Level 1 - Employee Satisfaction

Did the participants enjoy the learning event? Did the instructor provide a stimulating and engaging learning experience? Did the participants perceive that their needs were met? That the objectives were achieved? That it was relevant? This level of evaluation is often referred to as a "smile sheet." It should not be

¹ Training and Development Handbook, Third Edition, McGraw Hill Book Company, 1987, pp. 301-348

trivialized, however, as training activities which are not engaging, needs-based, and enjoyable are not likely to be well-attended.

Level 2 - Employee Learning

Did learning occur? Did the participant come away from the experience with the skill or knowledge that was identified in the course objectives? A pre- and post-test is the most common way of determining if learning occurred.

Level 3 - Employee Application

Did the employee apply the new learning back on the job? If not, it is important to determine why not. What performance measures are used to determine that expectations are being met? Presuming a successful evaluation at level 2 (learning did occur), identify any factors that significantly contribute to the employee not applying what was learned (e.g., lack of necessary resources, obstacles, conflicts, systemic dysfunction, non-performance is being rewarded, etc.). An honest examination of these factors is essential to organizational health.

Level 4 - Contribution to Business Objective

When the employee applied what was learned, was there a contribution to an identified business objective? Were work methods improved? Did the new skills result in increased production? Reduced cost? Saved time? Improved services? Increased customer satisfaction? Improved morale? Decreased grievances or complaints? Improved capability to meet future demands? Did it add value? Did it eliminate needless functions or streamline processes? Of course, the only way to know if there were improvements is to have measured the time, service, morale, and capability before the training occurred and to measure it again afterward. What measures will you use to determine that improvements occurred?

Level 5 - Return on Investment

Was the training activity worth doing? Did your organization recover something of value compared to the costs of providing the training? This is determined by identifying all the costs in providing the training (development, delivery, materials, staff time for trainers, staff time for support, staff time for participants, purchase of services, etc.) and comparing them with dollar values assigned to improvements (i.e., the value of increased production, the amount of cost savings, dollar value of time saved, improved service level, or an increase in capability to meet future demands). To be considered significant, the value returned should be at least 1.4 times the value invested.